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#### REPORT OF THE MELOLOGICAL COMMITTEE.

##### *Mr. President and Members of the Chapter:*

Considering that this committee of the Chapter was not organized until the latter part of last May, and then with only three members, including myself, the work accomplished has been quite satisfactory.

The songs of several of our birds have been investigated, and considerable data of a miscellaneous character has been collected; but not sufficient to form any tables or deductions, which are, of course, very desirable and which we earnestly hope to present another season.

The difficulty in studying the songs of birds intelligently is great, and a certain knowledge of their habits and of their common, and also of their scientific names is requisite. It also requires great patience and perseverance.

In the report now before you we have endeavored to incorporate the subject-matter of all data collected by us, and to present it in a form satisfactory to all; and if in any way we are mistaken in

our statements, we hope that they will be pointed out and explained, that we may be more able to avoid them in the future.

The range of our observations has been extensive, the three localities in which data have been collected being Eubanks, Ky., Binghamton, N. Y. and East Providence Centre, R. I.

Mr. John B. Lewis of Eubanks, Ky., has sent in several reports from that locality, from which some very interesting and instructive deductions have been made.

The Blue Yellow-backed Warbler or Parula Warbler (*Compsothlypis americana*) is a tolerably common summer resident in that locality. It inhabits deep forests and is seldom seen anywhere except in the tree-tops.

It begins to sing on its arrival in the spring, (April 6 to 10) and may be heard from that time till about July 3. There are two different songs. The first, and by far the most common, is a high, fine and very energetic utterance of a series of notes resembling the syllables "cher-r-r-r-rip." The first syllable is very strongly rolled at the end, and the closing "rip" is very much emphasized and given a slight falling inflection. The song is delivered with all the vim the tiny body of the singer can put into it, and the closing syllable is positively jerked out.

The second song is not uttered with so much energy, and is by no means so sharp and shrill. It resembles the syllables "chee-chee-chee-*cheeah*," the syllables which are in italics are delivered with more force and emphasis than the others and the *last* syllable receives a falling inflection.

My observations lead me to think that the first song is the one generally uttered during the mating season, and that the second form is used more frequently later in the year. It is not probable that the height at which the bird is perching has anything to do with the difference in the song, although once when the bird was observed near the ground it uttered the second form while in the low bushes, and resumed the first and more energetic form on re-ascending.

The two forms do not belong to the different sexes, as the same bird has often been heard to utter both within less than half a minute.

The Towhee (*Pipilo erythrophthalmus*) is a resident species at Eubanks, Ky., and is quite abundant, breeding in March and April. It is a very industrious and interesting songster.

The situation generally chosen when singing is the top of a tree, at a height of from twenty to sixty feet.

The song is a clear, sweet combination of whistle and trill. It is of moderate power, perhaps should be called loud, and is often regularly repeated at short intervals for half an hour at a time, without the bird changing its position.

They begin to sing about February 25, and continue in full song all summer. In the spring they sing at all hours of the day, but later in the season they are heard more towards sunset.

The Pine-woods Sparrow (*Peucaea aestivalis*) is a common summer resident at Eubanks, Ky. It frequents the sedge fields and meadows. It begins to sing on its arrival in the spring, (March 20). It sings at all hours of the day, but is at its best in the evening from sunset until it is quite dark. On several occasions these sparrows have been heard singing quite late at night after a thunder shower. As they have never been heard singing at night except after a storm, it is supposed to be caused by the rain having awakened them.

They sing from the top of a fence, a weed or any other convenient perch. The song is not very powerful, but sweet, clear and far-reaching. It is always uttered slowly and deliberately, and carries with it a sense of calm, peace and contentment which places it among the sweetest of our native song-birds.

The song in all its varieties is rather high, the first note is always prolonged and the last part is trilled or rippled.

The Pine-woods Sparrow is an industrious songster in the spring, when he will repeat his song at intervals of from a quarter to half a minute almost all day, only stopping long enough to feed. After the first of July he only sings in broken snatches, and that for the most part in the evening.

The American Goldfinch (*Squius tristis*) is a common resident at Eubanks, Ky., where it breeds during July and August. It has a quite lively song, and a plaintive and exquisitely tender call-note. The bird has an undulating flight, each undulation

being usually accompanied by a repetition of a tender, liquid note, of the syllables "chu-chu-chu." The bird's voice runs down the scale as his body falls through the air.

Another familiar call, usually uttered while at rest, is a tender, liquid whistle, uttered in a questioning tone. The song proper is not very loud but is sweet and pleasing. It is roughly illustrated by the following syllables: "chua-chua-pece-pece-pece-cha-cha-chu-ee." This is uttered rapidly and in a sweet, rippling voice. The foregoing is given as typical of that phase of the song, and is sometimes sung exactly as described, but it is generally very much modified, being so mixed up and interspersed with extra dashes and flourishes as to be scarcely recognizable.

Mr. Clute, of Binghamton, N. Y., writes as follows, under date of August 20:

In this section, the majority of summer residents, except the Goldfinch and Indigo Bunting have become silent; an occasional Field, Song, Chipping or Savannah Sparrow may be heard.

The last Robin's song was heard Aug. 1. Numbers of Chipping Sparrows continued to sing until July 21. The last Bay-winged Bunting was heard July 8, but the bulk stopped singing long before that. The last song heard from a Catbird, Bluebird or Wilson's Thrush was on July 8.

Most of the birds sing liveliest in the early morning, exceptions being the Goldfinch, Indigo Bird and especially the House Wren, which sings all day. The Wood Pewee, Song Sparrow, Chipping Sparrow and House Wren also sing at night. As the season grows later, bird songs are heard more frequently in the vicinity of water. The Brown Thrush occasionally sings its full song on the wing, but probably only during the mating season.

The Robin has a call exactly like that of the Cedar Waxwing, for which it has often been mistaken. The Chickadee's call of "pee-wee" may be easily whistled and used as a decoy. In the winter and spring, this call, if repeated, will bring the whole flock around within arms length, but in late summer the call only has the effect of starting the whole flock to calling "chick-a-dee-dee-dee."

Mr. Bridgham reports from East Providence Centre, R. I., as follows:

The Wood Pewee (*Contopus virens*) is an abundant summer

resident in this locality. All through the early part of summer, its notes, "pee-a-wee" and "a-pee-wee" could be heard at any time of day one chose to wander through the woods. Its favorite haunts seem to be the tall pine forests with a light undergrowth, where it flits about in the branches, just above the tops of the bushes, darting about after insects, but making its headquarters, so to speak, on some projecting twig, whence it can survey some open glade.

When it is disturbed it calls in a petulant, querulous tone, uttering only the syllable "pee-ee" with the accent or stress of voice on the last part. Towards midsummer its call is uttered less frequently, and the absence of it is very noticeable. Later in the season this call is dropped entirely for a cry resembling the first syllable of its ordinary call, and, strange as it may seem, its former call, uttered very rapidly, becomes its note of alarm.

Another prominent bird in this locality is the Kingbird (*Tyrannus tyrannus*). It, too, is a common resident, and it makes the air resound with its shrill cry all through the season. Perched on the tallest birch, by the edge of some river-meadow, he will look about for a little while, uttering his cry of "kree" at regular intervals of a quarter of a minute, and then he will dart off after an insect, after catching which, he will vociferate his "kree-kree-kree" as if to let everyone know of it, and then he will return to his perch on the birch. Often towards sunset, you may see them cruising high in the air, catching gnats and other insects that come out at that time.

Sometimes they have desperate quarrels among themselves or with some other bird, and then they use a call differing from the other only in being so harsh, resembling more the syllables "tsee-tsee-tsee." The calls of this bird are not musical, but the bird itself seems to take great pleasure in repeating them.

The Blue Jay (*Cyanocitta cristata*) is perhaps the most plentiful of the large birds in this vicinity. Individuals remain here all winter, and the woods are full of them in summer. Such meetings, such discussions about "pay-ee-pay-ee" no other bird would indulge in! Morning, noon or night, rain or shine, the azure back of the Jay may be seen disappearing over the tall tops of the pines, or picking berries and buds on some swinging branch. Seven varieties of calls have been counted.

Towards the last of July or the first of August, the American Goldfinch makes his appearance. His song resembles that of our household canary, except the bell notes are not so full, and people not familiar with him often mistake him for an escaped canary. It sings most in the early morning, but its call-notes may be heard all day. These latter are of several varieties. The most common are represented below.

First—"chee-pee, chee-pee," with a slight falling inflection.

Second—"chu-ee, chu-ee," with a rising inflection.

Third—"par,-chee-chu-choo," with a falling inflection and a slight rest after the first syllable.

The last is by far the most common, being uttered both while flying and while at rest, but more frequently while flying.

The notes of birds vary greatly at different seasons and under different circumstances. For example; of the seven varieties of the Jay's call; two seem to be used for a reason very similar to that which prompts a boy to whistle, (and with about the same success as far as music is concerned); two seem to be caressing and colloquial in character; one is a note of warning; one seems to express alarm merely, and the other seems to call others to the neighborhood of the bird uttering it.

It is desirable to know if the notes of the sexes are the same or not, and whether the cries they utter are the same vowel or syllable, with only a difference as to time and inflection of voice, or a different vowel or syllable. We are also endeavoring to learn if there is any similarity between the calls of different birds under the same circumstances, and how much one species understands the calls of another species. The note of a Jay or a Crow, for example, will put many other birds to flight, which take no notice of the ordinary calls of those birds, showing a knowledge of the meaning of the alarm note.

It has long been known that if one imitates the cry of a bird in pain, it will bring many members of the feathery tribe within eyeshot, and if, as we stated in another part of this report, the call of the Chickadee be imitated it will have various effects according to the season of the year, as there explained.

There are so many points to notice, and so much to observe that for the sake of similarity and unity of effort in studying bird-songs, we have prepared and to a certain extent already adopted

with good results a set of comparisons and suggestions to be followed as far as possible by our observers. This list of comparisons and suggestions, will be forwarded most willingly to all who are willing to help by taking observations. Of course, notes on subjects not included in these lists are very desirable, but if our members will work on these suggestions we hope to get something next year in a tangible form from which to deduce conclusions.

To imitate and describe the note of a bird requires great skill, a delicate ear and a good memory, and therefore many are apt to give it up after a few trials. But any attempt is a great help, and as the same difficulty confronts nearly all, the data received will be peculiarly fit for comparison, and moreover a little trial and experience will greatly improve both the power of discrimination and description.

Therefore, we earnestly hope that all those interested in ornithology will aid in our first attempt at studying bird-songs by contributing whatever data may come under their notice.

S. WILLARD BRIDGHAM,

Chairman Committee on Melology.